



# IT'S A SMALL WORLD: AMERICAN INDIAN

**Project Skills:**

- Using the techniques of American Indians, youth will construct a cattail mat.
- Youth will measure, mix and bake muffins using cranberries, an American Indian food item.

**Life Skills:**

- Accepting differences

**Academic Standards:**

- Social Studies E.4.13. Investigate and explain similarities in the ways that cultures meet human needs.

**Grade Levels:** 3

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Supplies Needed:**

Cranberry Muffins Activity

- Baking equipment (bowl, spoon, measuring cups and spoons, muffin tin, oven, hotpad, sifter)
- Flour
- Sugar
- Salt
- Baking powder
- Vegetable oil
- Egg
- Orange juice
- Cranberries
- Vanilla

Cattail Mats Activity

- Dried cattail leaves (only the leaves, not the flowering stem)
- Scissors
- Water and bin for soaking

**BACKGROUND**

American Indians of old times had to depend on getting everything that they needed from the earth – including their food, clothing, housing and sleeping materials.

The preparation and use of natural materials are skills that were perfected by the American Indians. They used many different kinds of natural materials in their daily lives, including birch, cedar and cattail. We see cattail here in Wisconsin as it borders our marshes and other wetlands.

American Indians used cattails for many things, including food, shelter and even toys. Cattail is a great medium for children and adults to use in gaining experience in working with natural materials.

**WHAT TO DO**

**Activity: Cranberry Muffins**

Begin today's lesson by asking the group to share the ways in which their families eat cranberries (if they do!).

Share with the group that nuts, berries and fruits were important parts of the diet for the American Indians that lived in Wisconsin. One of the fruits that American Indians ate (and still eat!) is the cranberry. Cranberries used to be known as crane-berries, because they grew in the marshes where the large bird known as a crane was found. Though they are called cran-BERRIES, they are really fruits, not berries!

All children can participate in the making of simple but delicious Cranberry Muffins (see recipe below). While muffins are baking, begin the next activity.

Sift together:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 ¼ cup sugar
- 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking soda

Mix in:

- ¼ cup vegetable oil

Add and stir until evenly mixed:

- 1 egg, well-beaten
- ¾ cup orange juice

Fold in:

- 1 ½ cups whole or halved cranberries
- 1 tsp vanilla

To finish, spoon batter into prepared muffin cups, two-thirds full. Then bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. The recipe makes 15 muffins.

**Activity: Cattail Mats**

Participants will weave a cattail mat with materials and techniques used by American Indians. Larger mats made in this fashion were used by American Indians as sleeping mats. Begin this portion of the lesson by discussing where cattails grow.



**Do Ahead:**

- Gather cattail leaves during the summer or fall, separate them, and let them dry slowly in the shade for at least one week. You can gather them and let them dry over winter, but they will need a longer soaking period.
- Before class, soak the cattails for one-half hour in warm water. A wallpapering bin works great for this.

**Sources:**

- Created by Paula Rogers Huff, 4-H Youth Development Agent, UW-Extension, Oconto County
- Recipe from the Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network, Wisconsin Cranberry Board, Inc., and USDA Food and Nutrition Service

**Procedure for making mats:**

1. Use prepared cattails in this activity (see Do Ahead in sidebar).
2. When the leaves become pliable, remove them from the water and snip off the ends, so that you have a fairly uniform width.
3. Use your thumbs and your bent forefingers to apply steady pressure and gently break down the fibers of the leaf all along its length. This is a very important step in preparing the cattail leaf; it makes the leaves pliable and easier to weave.
4. Choose straight, even cattail leaves and cut them with a scissor into uniform lengths.
5. Lay out the crosswise reeds until you reach your desired size (6 x 6 is a good size). Keep in mind that your finished size will be smaller than this.
6. Begin to weave in the center of the mat – under and then over crosswise reeds – with the length-wise strands. As you add strands, push each strand tightly toward the center – they need to be as tight as possible, because the cattails will shrink.
7. Weave the entire mat in this fashion, finishing by tucking the end strands under the reeds on the back of the mat. If your reeds are very dry, they may not bend under and they will need to be clipped and secured with a drop of glue. Use masking tape to clamp them.
8. Dry the mat for a day or two under a stack of books or heavy blocks using a piece of cardboard for a moisture barrier.

**TALK IT OVER****Reflect:**

- What made the cattails more “bendable”?
- What do you like best about your mat?
- What would you do differently if you were to make another mat?
- Would a mat made like this (but bigger) be comfortable for sleeping?

**Apply:**

- What are some other things that American Indians could have made using cattails?
- What things do you get directly from the earth for your daily life?
- What do you think it would be like to have to depend on the earth to give you everything that you need, like cranberries for food and cattails for sleeping mats?
- How does that compare to the way in which you get most things for your daily life?

**ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY****Enhance for Older Children:**

Try the toy cattail ducks found at [www.nativetech.org](http://www.nativetech.org).

**Simplify for Younger Children:**

Use paper strips to weave a mat.

***Reviewed by Wisconsin 4-H Afterschool Team: October 2004***